



Michigan National Organization for Women

Post Office Box 860
East Lansing, Michigan 48826
(517) 485-9687
www.michnow.org

To: Members of the House Judiciary Committee
Re: **House Bill 5515**
Date: November 4, 2009

Greetings:

Michigan NOW urges the Michigan House Judiciary Committee to refer **House Bill 5515**. HB 5515 would amend the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to apply the remedies in that law to a woman breastfeeding her child in a public place.

A woman using her mammary glands for their primary intended natural purpose, breast feeding, have risked harassment, retaliation, and have even been threatened with arrest for exposing their breast while nursing their baby. Nursing mothers have experienced exclusion from public places like shopping malls, restaurants, and public transportation facilities when they are nursing their babies, yet have little legal recourse against the owners or operators of these facilities.

Several years ago one of the Lansing shopping malls chased off a nursing mother and it was reported in the local media. Nursing mothers banded together for a NURSE-IN at the mall. Needless to say, the shopping mall management caved in and allowed the mothers to nurse their babies in the mall due to the overwhelming public support for the women and their babies.

Nursing a baby is a natural consequence of birth and in fact, healthy for most mothers and their babies. Public policy should encourage it, not discourage it. Discrimination against nursing mothers is a holdover from Puritanical and Victorian era customs when all things related to human sexuality and women's reproductive capacities were considered taboo in public places. Pregnant women, a reminder of human sexuality, were banned from employment opportunities or prohibited from public places. Michigan needs to abandon these moralistic concepts and protect nursing mothers who want to take their babies with them in public, and nurse them when necessary.

The National Organization for Women (NOW) is the largest, most comprehensive multi-issue feminist advocacy group in the United States. Our purpose is to take action to bring women into full participation in society — sharing equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities with men, while living free from discrimination.

Mary Pollock
Legislative Vice President